

PROGRESS TEST FILES 1-5

Listening 1

Speaker 1 Yeah, my car's got a satnav system in it, it's the first car I've ever owned that's got one of those. I didn't use it much at first, preferred to carry on working out routes using map books as I'd always done. I didn't fancy the idea of some robotic voice talking to me while I was driving along, and I'd read in the papers that they can be rather unreliable. Then, I was taking a pretty complicated trip across a city I'd never been to and I thought it was a good opportunity to give it a try. I got a mate who swears by his to show me how to use it, and it was great. Now I use it for every trip when I don't know exactly where I'm going and it makes me wonder how I ever managed before I had it. I wouldn't dream of fiddling about with map books and all that now and I've got no idea how I ever managed before I got it. I rely on it completely.

Speaker 2 I recently bought the very latest in mobile phone technology – my previous phone was pretty old and hopelessly outdated. This one's got all the very latest features – at least until they bring out even more sophisticated ones and it gets outdated itself! It's great and it's really useful to me in all sorts of ways. It took me ages to work out how to use some of the features – actually I had to get the kids to help me out with some of that, they know a lot more about that sort of thing than me. And of course, they want me to get them the same kind of phone now, and they're always moaning about how 'rubbish' the phones they've got are. They were perfectly happy with them before I got mine. Every time they go on at me to get them new phones, I regret getting it, it's causing all sorts of arguments. So although I really like it, in some ways it would have been better if I'd stuck with the 'rubbish' one I had before.

Speaker 3 I recently got an in-car DVD player so that the kids could watch films while we're on long journeys. It cost quite a bit, but I thought it would keep them quiet while I'm driving. Well, of course, when I first got it, they were thrilled and couldn't wait to get in the car. I thought the novelty value might wear off after a while, but far from it. So it's been a great hit with them, but it hasn't actually had the effect on journeys I'd been expecting it to have. Before I got it, they used to get bored very quickly and shout and argue and mess about all the time, which made long journeys very stressful. Now, they're not bored, quite the opposite, but there's just as much noise, if not more. They like all these noisy films and they talk and shout all the way through them about what's happening in them. And they keep telling me what's just happened even though I can't actually see the things. So I'm just as stressed out in the driver's seat as I was before. But they have a great time, so I'm glad I got it.

Speaker 4 I got a laptop a little while back, so that I could do some work when I was out and about, and go on the internet wherever I am. I must say I hadn't realized how quickly the batteries run out and that often catches me unawares and without a supply to put into the thing to keep it going. So sometimes I'm in the middle of something and I can't complete it, which is very annoying. I know this is basically my fault for not being well prepared enough, but it always amazes me how quickly the power goes. On the plus side, though, it has been very useful and I've got a fair amount of use out of it. It's enabled me to get things done that I otherwise wouldn't have found the time to do. The kids always want to borrow it, of course, but even though they moan I've made it clear it's off-limits to them.

Speaker 5 I got a really good handheld games console a few months back – I'd always wanted to get one and finally I treated myself to it. Of course, these things are highly addictive and I must admit I spent rather too much time using it when I first got it. But I'm not someone who gets addicted to that kind of thing, much as I enjoy playing the games, and after a while I found that I wasn't playing on it quite so often or for so long. I guess the novelty wore off a bit, plus other people in my family were telling me I was on it too much. So I just pick it up and put it down from time to time now. I do find it very relaxing, actually, but I'm not going over the top with it now. As a result, the kids have found they're getting more chance to use it, which of course pleases them a lot. They've started to talk as if it belongs to them, which wasn't my intention at all!

PROGRESS TEST FILES 1-5

Listening 2

What's the connection between language and sport? You might not think there's any link between language skills and sport, but some new research shows that there is. And this link exists whether you take part in sports or simply watch them as a fan.

The research was carried out with hockey players, fans of that sport, and people who'd never seen or played it. They all listened to a set of sentences about the sport, involving things such as players shooting and making saves. They also listened to sentences about everyday activities, such as ringing doorbells or sweeping floors with brooms. While they listened to the sentences, their brain activity was examined using a technique called 'Magnetic Resonance Imaging', involving a scanner. When they had listened to the sentences, they did a series of tests designed to measure their comprehension of the sentences.

The results of these tests showed that all the subjects understood the language of everyday activities well. The hockey players and fans were significantly better at understanding the hockey-related language than the people who had never seen or played it and therefore knew little or nothing about it. Of course, this isn't surprising.

It's what the brain scans showed that reveals the link between language and sport. When the players and fans were listening to the sentences about their sport, a part of the brain that is usually associated with planning and controlling actions became activated. Even though they were not actually planning any action when they were listening to the sentences, this part of the brain became very active. And the increased activity in that part of the brain helped them to understand the language connected with the sport.

The conclusion is that the parts of the brain usually involved in playing sports are also used for understanding the language of sport. And you don't need to be a player for this to be true, as it's also the case for fans. The parts of the brain that are active when people are playing or watching a sport are also active when people are listening to the language of the sport.

So the experience of playing or watching sport has an effect on your ability to understand language associated with it. This could have some impact on approaches to language learning. It shows that if people are engaged in an activity, the same part of the brain that they use for engaging in that activity is used for understanding language related to it.

So next time you're kicking a ball in the park, or watching a game on TV, remember: you're also developing your language skills.

PROGRESS TEST FILES 6-10

Listening 1

Speaker 1 The smoking ban in bars and clubs and other public buildings came into force a couple of years or so ago, as I recall. Now you see great clumps of people gathered outside these places smoking. I don't think that's what the authorities imagined would happen when they introduced the ban. I'm sure they thought people would stop smoking, at any rate when they went to these places. But the reality is that people still smoke, they just gather on the pavement outside to do it. It seems daft, really. I've been to places where there were more people outside than inside! I can't imagine that people were predicting that, or wanted it to happen, when they were talking about bringing in this ban.

Speaker 2 Well, the council introduced parking restrictions in the area where I live earlier this year. Basically, if you have a resident's permit, you can park in my street any time, but if you don't, you can only park there at specific hours. It's true that parking can be a problem round here, but the residents weren't actually consulted on this and some people I've spoken to say that it causes problems for them when they have visitors, especially when they have people staying with them. I think the major problem is they keep changing the times when non-residents aren't allowed to park. The signs keep changing, but people don't always know they've changed. Some people think they can park when in fact they can't. They remember the permitted times and don't realize these have changed. It's a complete mess, really, and a lot of the time people don't know they're making a mistake.

Speaker 3 We always used to have an annual fireworks party organized by my club but now it's been banned on health and safety grounds. The council has decided that public firework displays are too dangerous and nobody in the area is allowed to have one. Well, I think this is completely daft. Of course, fireworks can be dangerous if people aren't careful with them, and I'm one of many people who think they shouldn't be generally available. But surely there's nothing wrong with a properly-organized display. We've been doing it before and everything's always gone smoothly. In fact, I think it's OK to restrict fireworks to organized displays only, if you want to reduce the possibility of people getting injured by fireworks. But there's no need for this wholesale ban and I really object to it.

Speaker 4 Not so long ago, it was decided that people wouldn't be allowed to use personal stereos and mobile phones and all that sort of thing in certain parts of trains because they cause a nuisance to other passengers. I'm all in favour of that – it drives me absolutely nuts to be sitting near someone who's got that dreadful sound coming out of their headphones, or who's nattering some inane gibberish on the phone. It was certainly time that something official was done about it, in my view. Anyway, I'm not sure what effect the ban has had. I've been on trains since it came into force, and despite the clear signs on the walls, people seem to carry on regardless, making their irritating calls and inflicting that horrible sound of the drums on everyone else. I don't know how many people have actually been fined for doing that, but they certainly seem to think they can get away with it.

Speaker 5 Things certainly seem to have improved since they introduced heavy fines for dropping litter in the street and started prosecuting people for doing it. I can't imagine there are many people who don't think that enforcing a ban on litter is a good thing – who wants to wade through piles of disgusting rubbish when they walk down the street? It was getting really bad round here, but now people seem to realize they might get seen doing it and end up with quite a big fine. A few cases of people being caught have been put in the local paper and that seems to have put people off doing it. The place is noticeably cleaner and tidier now, and everyone's glad this crackdown was brought in. I hope things stay that way.

PROGRESS TEST FILES 6-10

Listening 2

There can be no doubt that celebrity chefs have had a big impact on the way people in Britain eat. Since their arrival on TV decades ago, the British public's diet has changed enormously, and the celebrity chefs watched by so many millions have played a key part in that transformation.

One piece of evidence of this concerns perhaps the best-known of all the TV celebrity chefs in Britain, Delia Smith, who has been appearing on TV since the 1970s. A few years ago a popular English dictionary included the phrase 'Delia effect', which is used to describe the phenomenon whereby supermarkets suddenly get emptied of particular items that have featured on her TV programmes. If Delia uses a certain, perhaps rather unusual, ingredient in one of her recipes, people rush out to get it so that they can cook the dish too.

There can be no doubt that celebrity chefs have widened cooking and eating habits in Britain to a huge extent. For example, Chinese and Indian meals have been around in Britain since the 1960s, but for a long time people only ate them if they went out to eat. When the TV chefs Ken Hom and Madhur Jaffrey showed people how to cook them in the 1980s, stir fries and authentic curries became common dishes for people to eat at home. More recently, Jamie Oliver's mission to persuade people to eat healthy, home-cooked food rather than unhealthy junk food, takeaways and frozen food, has had an influence on the habits of many people in Britain.

One time when this didn't quite work, however, was when chef Anton Mosimann tried to introduce a whole new style of cooking to Britain in the 1980s. He didn't use cream, cheese or fat in his recipes and he encouraged people to use herbs rather than salt for flavouring. Such ideas are now fairly commonplace but back then they were ahead of their time and they didn't catch on.

Over the years, some celebrity chefs have appealed to a wealthier audience, with money to spend on unusual, exotic and expensive ingredients. But the ones with the most influence on people's dietary habits have been the ones who have aimed their recipes at a more ordinary audience. It is fair to say that without them, some of the dishes that people in Britain now routinely cook and eat would not have become so popular.